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THE ABORIGINAL TRIBES

OF

HYDERABAD

Volume III

THE RAJ GONDS

OF

ADILABAD

Book I

MYTH AND RITUAL

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THE RAJ GONDS OF ADILABAD

A Peasant Culture of the Deccan

Book I

MYTH AND RITUAL

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INTRODUCTION

101 NO aboriginal people of India has attained greater prominence on the political scene of past centuries than the large group of tribes commonly known by the generic term Gond. When the mist that still veils long periods in the history of the Deccan finally lifts, Gonds appear not only as the main population of wide areas in the very heart of India, described after them as Gondwana, but also as a ruling race equal in power and material status to many contemporary Hindu princes. Lacking unity and leadership the Gond states collapsed before the successive onslaughts of Moghul and Maratha armies, but the Gond populations remained, the old feudal system continued to function in [21] many remote tracts and several Gond rajas enjoy up to this day the status of ruling chiefs. But besides the advanced sections of the Gonds who vied with Hindus in the fields of war and statesmanship, there were and still are the great masses of primitive peasants and forest dwellers on a cultural level no higher than that of other aboriginal populations in the Central Indian zone. Of their economics, social organization and religion, historical sources tell us next to nothing, and the study of Gond culture, as a distinct element in the culture pattern of India, falls to the anthropologist, who finds an almost overwhelming wealth of material among the many vigorous branches of the Gond family.

184 101 [149] Spread over an area considerably larger than the British Isles and extending from the Godavari gorges in the south to the Vindhya Mountains in the north, the Gonds are neither racially, nor culturally, nor linguistically a homogeneous population. So great are the differences in custom and material circumstances between many of the widely scattered tribal groups that one may well wonder what causes them to be considered, and indeed to consider themselves, as members of the same race. Wherever we find Gonds, unless they are totally detribalized and merged with Hindu populations, they describe themselves as Gond or, if speaking Gondi, as Koitur, the universal equivalent of that name in all Gondi dialects. Were it not for those large groups of eastern Gonds, who speak Chhattisgarhi Hindi, the Gonds in the north-west of the Central Provinces, who speak western Hindi and the far smaller groups of Telugu speaking Gonds, better known as Koyas, in Hyderabad and Madras Presidency, it would probably be most satisfactory to replace, at least in ethnological usage, the general name "Gond" by the term "Gondi speaking populations," thus leaving it open whether there exists such an entity as a Gond people or only a group of peoples who to-day speak related languages. Indeed, I believe that we shall fail in

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our approach to the Gond problem—one of the cardinal problems of Deccan ethnology—unless we envisage the possibility that the tribes now known as Gonds, far from being the dispersed off-shoots of a once homogeneous people, attained a certain and very limited measure of cultural uniformity only when they came under the sway of the same dominant linguistic influence.

Gondi with its many local dialects is a Dravidian language of the so-called intermediate group, and stands, according to Grierson, closer to Tamil and Kanarese than to Telugu. But it seems highly improbable that the Dravidian tongues, which were no doubt associated with the representatives of the pre-Aryan high-civilizations of Southern India, should have been the original languages of tribal populations as primitive in racial and cultural make-up as the Hill Marias of Bastar and certain Koyas of Hyderabad. Just as such widely separated aboriginal tribes as the Chenchus of the Nallamallai Hills, the Hill Reddis of the Eastern Ghats and some, though not all, Naikpods and Kolams in the hills of Adilabad have adopted Telugu to the exclusion of any other tongue, without anyone considering Telugu as their original language[1] or claiming the present linguistic uniformity as proof of a genetic connection between all those tribes, so the peoples now speaking Gondi may, in times past, have abandoned older tribal tongues in favour of a Dravidian language spoken by neighbouring populations or the members of a ruling class. J. H. Hutton believes that by a similar process the Oraons of Chota Nagpur have adopted their present Dravidian tongue[2] in place of a Munda language, and I fully agree with his assumption that a large-scale Dravidianization of aboriginal tribes occurred partly previous and partly parallel to the Aryanization of which we are still witnesses.[3]

The idea that Dravidian Gondi represents a comparatively recent element in the linguistic pattern of the Central Indian belt has already been voiced by R. V. Russell, who put forward the theory of a Gond incursion into the Central Provinces from the south between the ninth and the thirteenth century A.D. This probably goes too far and is not supported by ethnological evidence; in solving the language problem it is not even necessary to assume a wholesale migration of all the Gond tribes from Dravidian lands south of the Godavari to the Central Provinces and the hill-tracts of Bastar. It is sufficient to postulate the invasion of a people limited in numbers but superior to the older tribal folks in organization and material equipment, and the subsequent spread of its Dravidian language and perhaps certain elements of its culture among the tribes previously speaking one or several older tongues. Indian history provides numerous examples of such an imposition of a foreign

1. In the case of Naikpods and Kolams an older tribal language is still spoken by other groups.
2. Oraon belongs to the same intermediate group as Gondi.
3. *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. I, Part I, p. 358.

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language on aboriginal populations, and it seems more probable that such tribes as the Muria Gonds, with their close cultural and racial affinities to the Austroasiatic Gadabas of Orissa, were subject to a change of language than that they immigrated from distant parts of Southern India.

We are not yet in a position to surmise which population may have been responsible for the spread of Gondi or which pre-Dravidian languages Gondi may have replaced. Both questions will perhaps remain for ever unanswered, but linguistic research among the Gondi speaking peoples, the still entirely mysterious Khonds, and the neighbouring Austroasiatic tribes may still lead to surprising results. Since the days of Grierson's Linguistic Survey few trained linguists have done fieldwork among the tribal populations of Peninsular India, and the most admirable descriptive works of amateurs cannot compensate for the absence of comparative studies by experts.[1]

The replacement of an older language by one of more recent introduction, is an accomplished fact among many of the eastern and northern Gonds, who speak now the Chhattisgarhi dialect of Hindi and various other local dialects. But there can be no doubt that these Aryan languages were adopted from neighbouring Hindu populations instead of tribal tongues, and certain place-names are to-day the only evidence that the languages previously spoken were related to the Gondi spoken by other sections of the Gond family.

According to the Census of India the total number of Gonds in 1931[2] was 3,063,753. With their strong tribal consciousness they are the premier aboriginal race of India, exceeding by more than one million the number of Bhils and dwarfing such tribes as Oraons, Mundas, Hos and Santals.

The majority of Gonds—2,261,138 in 1931—are found in the Central Provinces and Berar, which contain practically all the territories known to the early Moghul writers as Gondwana. Except for Buldana in the extreme south-west, there is no district in the Central Provinces

1. The limited value of linguistic material contained in the writings of anthropologists is to some extent obvious even to the authors; such texts, for instance, as given in this volume may facilitate the linguist's approach to an unwritten language, but they are insufficient as a basis for linguistic conclusions. For very relevant phonetic peculiarities may entirely escape the attention of the untrained observer, or defeat his attempts at recording them. In linguistics as in anthropology there is no substitute for field work. The dearth of authoritative works on the tribal languages of India was lamented by J. H. Hutton in his Census report: "There is, however, a serious void in our knowledge in that no intensive work appears to have been done on the tribal dialects of southern India, so that it is impossible to say whether the Munda languages ever penetrated to the extreme south of India or not. The linguistic survey unfortunately did not include southern India in its scope, and there is therefore a crying need for an intensive study of the dialects spoken by such tribes as the Kadar, Kurumans, Paliyans, Panians and Thanda Paliyans, with the object of discovering whether or no any Munda survivals are to be found." (Op. cit., p. 159). Hutton's call to linguists has, to my knowledge, remained largely unheeded. M. B. Emeneau who worked among the Todas being a laudable exception. But equally urgent as the study of the tribal dialects of South India is intensive work on the tribal languages of the Central belt.

2. No later figures for individual tribes are available, the Census operations of 1941 having been curtailed for reasons of economy.

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101 without a considerable Gond population, but the main strongholds of
162 the Gonds are to-day the Satpura plateau including the districts of Betul,
197 Chhindwara and Seoni, where the western type of Gondi is spoken, Mandla and Chhattisgarh in the east, where the Gonds have adopted the local dialect of eastern Hindi but retained their tribal identity, and in the south Chanda and the neighbouring Yeotmal, where the language is Gondi, but of a dialect somewhat different from the Gondi of Betul.

101 To the north-west the Gonds extend across the Narbada River into
691 Central India, and are particularly numerous in Indore State; to the
197 east of the Central Provinces lie the states of Gond princes, such as
[619] Kawardha, Sakti, Raigarh and Sarangarh, to-day known as the Chhattisgarh States. Although neither these Gond rajas, nor indeed the Gonds among their subjects speak Gondi, they are fully conscious of their tribal associations and the high status of the ruling princes adds no doubt to tribal prestige in the whole of Chhattisgarh.

Further south, bordering on Chanda, Drug and Raipur, extend the two States of Kanker and Bastar, where Gonds constitute the majority of the population. Bastar in particular is the home of three important groups of Gonds: the Murias, the Hill Marias and the Bisonhorn Marias, all of which differ in language and custom very considerably from the Gonds of the Central Provinces.[1] Their colourful and complex cul-
[174] tures are representative of ancient aboriginal India and show obvious affinities with the Austroasiatic cultures of Orissa and Chota Nagpur. Bastar has also part in the Koyas or Dorlas of the Godavari area, the most southern branch of the Gond family occurring in considerable strength in Madras Presidency and Hyderabad State and stretching across the barrier of the Eastern Ghats into the vicinity of Rajahmundry. Most Koyas still speak a dialect of Gondi, but those surrounded by Telugu populations, have changed over to Telugu.

Another substantial group of Gonds, closely akin to the Gonds of Yeotmal and Chanda, is found in the hilly country between the Godavari and the Penganga Rivers constituting the Adilabad District of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions, and it is these Gonds who form the subject of the present work.

101 All the Gonds of Adilabad, except for an insignificant overflow of
186 Dhurwe Gonds from Chanda, consider themselves Raj Gonds, and this brings us to the still somewhat problematic division between Raj Gonds and Dhur or Dhurwe Gonds, which runs through the greater part of the Gond population within the Central Provinces. There seems to be no uniformity in the principles ruling this division; in Chhattisgarh only the members of ruling, or formerly ruling families are described as Raj Gond, while in other parts most of the land-holding Gonds aspire to this denomination. In recent times the name Raj Gond has also been
[64] claimed by certain Gonds who have tried to raise their social status by

1. The Hill Murias extend into the hills of the neighbouring Chanda District.

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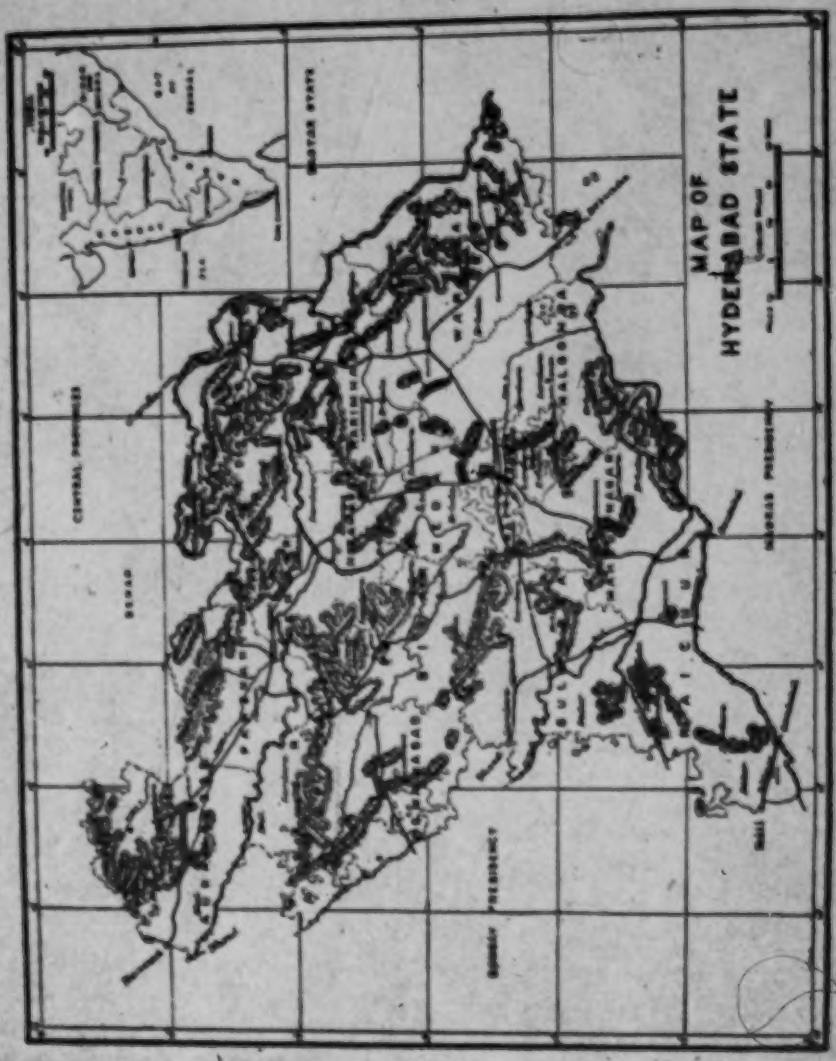

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compliance with Hindu customs, and "Raj-Gond" reform movements have made their appearance in the Central Provinces.

Various theories have been advanced to explain the distinction between Raj Gonds and the other sections of the Gond peoples. C. B. Lucie-Smith writing of the Raj Gonds of Chanda suggested that either "the epithet Raj was originally applied to royal and noble Gond families, from which the distinction spread to their followers and the governing class generally; or it may describe the leading Gond tribe which in ancient days conquered the land from other aboriginal clans."[1] But Captain Forsyth believed that Raj Gonds are in many cases the descendants of alliances between Rajput adventurers and Gonds, and R. V. Russell quotes this view with qualified approval.[2]

W. V. Grigson on the other hand lays emphasis rather on the social than the historical causes for the distinction and suggests that such names as Raj Gond arose from "the tendency, familiar throughout India, of local groups of primitive races which are gradually being Hinduized to regard themselves and to be accepted by their Hindu neighbours as separate Hindu castes under new names."[3] The situation in Adilabad seems rather to accord with the second suggestion advanced by Lucie-Smith; for here the Raj Gonds do not form a ruling class or even a class of privileged economic status, but an entire tribal group comprising all strata of society from the feudal chiefs down to the poorest labourer. We will see in a later chapter that the once powerful Gond Kings of Chanda belonged to this group, and their kinsmen in the Adilabad hills were as early as the 17th century referred to as Raj Gonds in patents of the Emperor Aurangzeb.

Here the Raj Gonds, far from aspiring to inclusion in the Hindu fold, consider themselves the true exponents of Gond culture and Gond language, and above all of the traditional Gond religion which involves the sacrifice of cows at the rites for the clan-gods. Many of them have never met a Dhurwe Gond, but those who have come in contact with the few groups of Dhurwe Gonds who have recently drifted across the Chanda border, look down upon them as speaking a corrupt form of Gondi intermixed with much Marathi, and as following different customs; somewhat sweepingly and apparently unjustly they assert that the Dhurwe Gonds have no cult of clan deities "only worshipping Bhimsens like Kolams."

It seems indeed that the Raj Gonds of Adilabad, who have lived for almost a century and a half under Muslim rule, and have in consequence been less exposed to the influence of the more intolerant exponents of Hinduism, have retained more of their old culture than

1. *Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Chanda District, Central Provinces.* 1869. Nagpur 1870, p. 46.
2. *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India.* London 1916. Vol. III, p. 45.
3. W. V. Grigson. *The Maria Gonds of Bastar.* London, 1938 p. 30.

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most of their tribesmen in the Central Provinces.

In order to understand the historical position of the Gonds both in Hyderabad and in the Central Provinces we must briefly review the course of political events during the last five centuries, and in doing so, anticipate, the fuller discussion of historical developments contained in Book II.

Reliable information on the early history of the Gonds is scarce and not until Muslim times do Gond states figure in contemporary chronicles and the works of historians. There can indeed be little doubt that throughout ancient and mediæval times the larger part of the Gond country east of Berar remained a land of vast forests and poor communications. Few foreign travellers seem to have traversed it and the old literature contains but the scantiest references to its inhabitants. Yet, its 'wildness' should not be exaggerated. Buddhist relics have been found in various places and it is not unlikely that there were times when pioneers of advanced civilizations settled among the aboriginal tribesmen just as there were periods when such outposts of higher culture shrank into insignificance. In Chanda District, for instance, Bhandak near the Wardha River seems to have been a centre of Buddhism and various authorities identify this place with the old Kosala capital visited in the seventh century by Hiuen Tsiang.[1] In Bhandak has also been discovered an inscription of the Rashtrakuta King, Krishna I, the builder of the Kailasa Temple at Ellora, dealing with the grant of a village when the King was camping in Yeotmal.[2] From Buddhist times date also the Pandrolena cave-temples at Mahur in the westernmost corner of the Adilabad District, and the famous Dev Deshwar temple at Mahur—mentioned in the Garur Purana and for the last seven centuries under the guardianship of monks of the Mahanubhau sect—proves that Mahur, formerly known as Matapur, retained its importance into Hindu times.

From inscriptions and old coins we know moreover that from the 9th century A.D. onwards Rajput princes were established in various parts of the Central Provinces. Tripuri, the heart of the later Gond Kingdom of Garha-Mandla, and Chhattisgarh, for instance, were for centuries ruled by the Rajput dynasty of Haihaiya bansi. Although further archæological finds may gradually add to our knowledge of the colonies founded by such Rajput chieftains, little elucidation of the early fortunes of its Gond population can be expected from that side.

We must therefore turn to the early Muslim writers who, from the 14th century on, comment in their chronicles on campaign and political developments in the territories described by them as Gond-

1. S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London 1906, Vol. II, pp. 209, 214.—R. B. Hira Lal, 'Prehistoric Berar,' *Shivaji Jubilee Number*, Vol. I, Yeotmal, 1933, pp. 2, 3.

2. Hashid Jafri, 'Materials for Historic Research in Berar,' *Shivaji Jubilee Number*, Vol. I, p. 12.

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wana.[1] The dawn of the 15th century finds a Gond dynasty firmly 175
established in Garha, close to the Narbada River and Jubbulpore. The Maharajas of Garha exercised overlordship over the local Gond petty chieftains of the present districts of Jubbulpore, Mandla, Seoni, Chhindwara and Balaghat, Damoh, and parts of Hoshangabad and Betul, and retained their independence until the year 1564 A.D., when a Moghul army under Asaf Khan conquered Garha and the famous queen-regent Durgavati was slain in battle. After a period of administration by Mahommedan officers or jagirdars, the government reverted to all practical purposes to the Gond Rajas of the old family and their subordinate chiefs, who had, however, to recognize the sovereignty of the Moghul emperors. The end of the Gond dynasty of Garha came in 1780 A.D. when the Marathas imprisoned the last ruler and brought the state under direct control. South and west of Garha another Gond State arose early in the 17th century: the Kingdom of Deogarh. Its rulers, tributaries of the Maharajas of Garha, took advantage of the decline of their overlords' power subsequent to the Moghul conquest and secured for themselves a large part of the territories of Garha.

The third great Gond dynasty of the Central Provinces was that of Chanda, and it is this dynasty with which we are most directly concerned in our study of the Gonds of Hyderabad. For the Rajas of Chanda ruled over a large part of what is to-day the Adilabad District and many of the Hyderabad Gonds still recognize their authority in tribal matters. When the chieftains residing at Chanda, a fortified town on the banks of the Wardha River, first attained prominence cannot be said for certain. C. U. Wills, the author of a history of the Gond dynasties of Garha-Mandla and Deogarh[2] declares that for the south of the Central Provinces, namely Chanda and Bastar, the record of events is so meagre and inconsistent that he despaired of compiling a local history of any kind. He evidently considers the historical data contained in C. B. Lucie-Smith's *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Chanda District, Central Provinces*, 1869, entirely unreliable and based on late Brahmanical fabrications of a kind similar to the Ramnagar inscription of Mandla whose trustworthiness he has convincingly refuted.[3] The chronicle of the Chanda Rajas, as outlined by Lucie-Smith, is no doubt largely legendary and the date 870 A.D. for the establishment of the Gond dynasty as well as most of the subsequent dates belong to the realm of imagination. Notwithstanding its character as a fairly recent fabrication by Brahmins attached to the court of Chanda, the chronicle contains,

1. I do not propose to add to the unconvincing derivations of the names 'Gond' and 'Gondwana,' these appearing for the first time in literature, and confess that I have to offer no explanation for these terms, which have their origin in some of the Gondi dialects.

2. *The Raj Gond Mahoraja of the Satpura Hills*, Nagpur, 1925.

3. Op. cit. pp. 13-24.—The Ramnagar inscription, which was found 10 miles south-east of Mandla, is written in Sanskrit and professes to give the family tree of the Gond Rajas of Garha, tracing back the dynasty through 54 generations.

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175 a number of traditions which are probably of considerable age and not entirely without foundation. Thus it reports that the first Gond Raja of Chanda was of Atram clan and that the fortress of Manikgarh, which lies in the hills of Rajura Taluq, was his main stronghold. Of one of his descendants, Hir Sing the chronicle says that he first "levied an impost on occupied ground," while "previous to his accession land had been like air, untaxed and free to all";—this seems to reflect the memory of a time when the Gonds paid not land-revenue but nominal tribute to their tribal chieftains. The stories of various encounters between the later Rajas of Chanda and the Emperors of Delhi are in line with the epics still sung by the Pardhans, the bards of the Raj Gonds of Adilabad, but we reach firmer ground when we find Chanda mentioned in the *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl. Chanda, like the other Gond states, then formed part of the Moghul empire, and when during Shah Jahan's reign Khan Dauran undertook an expedition against rebellious Gonds of Deogarh, he was reinforced by troops of the Gond Raja of Chanda. In Aurangzeb's times both Chanda and Deogarh were included in the *subah* of Berar, and Sir A. Lyall mentions that according to old revenue papers of 1666, "tribute was collected from the zamindars of those tracts, that is the Gond Rajas, and carried to the treasury at Aurangabad."[1] Some of the Gonds of the Adilabad highlands still possess patents (*sanads*) bestowed upon their ancestors by Aurangzeb, and according to these documents Utnur Taluq belonged then to the *subah* of Bidar and not to Berar. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 A.D. the Gond Rajas seem to have repudiated their allegiance to the Emperor of Delhi, but their newly gained independence was short-lived. They were far too weak and too divided among themselves to resist the rising power of the Marathas. Soon after Raghoji Bhonsla of Berar had established himself at Nagpur in 1739, he undertook the conquest of the Gond States and in 1749 the city of Chanda fell to a besieging Maratha army. For two years a shadow of power remained to the Gond Raja, but in 1751 the state was incorporated in the Bhonsla Kingdom, and the ruler Nilkant Shah was imprisoned. In recounting the end of the Chanda kingdom Lucie-Smith pays tribute to the achievement of its ancient dynasty: "Originally petty Chiefs of a savage tribe, they spread their sway over a wide dominion, reclaiming and peopling the wild forests in which they dwelt, and, save a nominal allegiance to the Delhi throne, preserving their soil for nine hundred years inviolate of foreign rule.[2] When at length they fell, they left, if we forget the few last years, a well-governed and contented kingdom, adorned with admirable works of engineering skill, and prosperous to a point no after time has reached.

1. *Gazetteer for the Hyderabad Assigned Districts (Berar)*, edited in 1870 by A. Lyall.

2. As mentioned above the chronology accepted by Lucie Smith is subject to doubt, but though no definite period for their reign can be given, the prominence of the chiefly house of Chanda is certainly of considerable antiquity.

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Other dynasties in the great drama of Indian story have played parts far more striking, but few have deserved so well of those they governed as the ancient house whose power passed away with Nilkant Shah."[1] The respect commanded by the chiefly house among their Gond subjects can be judged by the influence the rajas retained even when their secular power came to an end, for they continued to function as tribal headmen and their authority in all questions concerning custom and ritual remained unimpaired. 175

Until 1853, when the whole of the Nagpur State was taken under British administration, Raghoji's descendants ruled over Chanda, but the tract west of the Wardha river, containing the important fortress of Manikgarh and constituting to-day the Rajura Taluq, was ceded to the *Subahs* of the Deccan by the treaty of Deogaon in 1803 A.D.,[2] and has ever since formed part of the Nizam's Dominions.

From the scanty historical information available on the Chanda Kingdom it is not clear how far it extended towards the south west. Manikgarh Fort is frequently mentioned as one of the main strongholds of the Chanda Rajas, but no data appear to exist on the rest of the hill-tracts of the present Adilabad District. A family of Kumra clan now living in Utnur taluq claims descent from Gond chieftains who once held the Mahur fortress and it is possible that the Chanda Rajas exerted at one time or other overlordship over the whole of the Gond country between the Penganga and the Godavari, but written history affords no proof for such an assumption and we will have to reconsider this question later in the light of local tradition. For certain we know only that in the years before the conclusion of the treaty of Deogaon, the territory now forming the taluqs of Sirpur, Chinnur, Asifabad, Lakshetipet, Utnur, Adilabad and Both, *i.e.*, practically the whole of the Adilabad District except the taluqs of Rajura and Nirmal was included in Berar,[3] which was then jointly administered by the Nizam and the Bhonsla Raja of Nagpur. We know too that this territory contains a number of ruined forts, inferior it is true, to that of Manikgarh, but not unlike it in style, and that these are believed to have been the seats of

1. *Op. cit.*, pp. 69, 70.

2. C. U. Wills, *British Relations with the Nagpur State in the 18th century*. Nagpur 1924, p. 248-251.

3. Under the Bahmani Kings the province of Berar was larger than it is to-day and extended as far South as the Godavari. In 1480 A.D. during the reign of Mahammad Shah III and the prime-ministership of the famous Persian Mahmud Gawan, it was divided into two sub-provinces: Gawil and Mahur. The latter included the whole of the present Yeotmal District as well as the tract between the Penganga, Pranhita and Godavari Rivers, now forming the Adilabad District of Hyderabad. During the disturbances following the execution of Mahmud Gawan, the Governor of Gawil declared his independence and founded the Imad Shahi kingdom of Berar, annexing also the sub-province of Mahur, which had remained a separate administrative unit only for fifteen years. Cf. Syed Abdur Razzaque, "Divisions of Berar," *Shivalakhram Varshik*, Vol. I, 1944, pp. 47-51. It is very unlikely, however, that the Imad Shahi Kings were able to establish effective rule in the hill-tracts of Adilabad. Nothing is known about their relations with the neighbouring Gond Rajas of Chanda, nor about the circumstances under which the present Rajura Taluq with the fort of Manikgarh was again separated from Berar and included in the domain of the Chanda Kings.

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175 local Gond Rajas. As to the political status of these petty chieftains *vis-à-vis* the Raja of Chanda on the one side and the Nizam and the Rajas of Nagpur on the other, the chronicles are silent. None of the early European travellers whose records shed a certain amount of light on other parts of the Deccan seem to have visited this hill-tract, and the confusion on Rennell's map of 1780 A.D.[1] shows that it was then still largely *terra incognita*.[2] However, a short reference to the present Adilabad District is contained in the account of Captain J. T. Blunt, who travelled in 1795 through Chanda and Bastar and then crossed the Godavari into the Samasthan of the Raja of Paloncha.[3] He mentions a trade route running from Chanda through Chinnur and Paloncha to Rajahmundry; he did not follow this himself but kept further east, "skirting along the east side of the Seerpur Pargunnah" which evidently corresponds to the present Sirpur Taluq. According to Blunt "the districts adjoining to the eastern parts of the *Mahratta* territory," through which he passed on that occasion, "were at this time under Jukut Row, a *Goand* chief who had formerly been the principal *Rajah* in the southern parts of *Goandwannah*, and who held them as a Jagheer from the *Berar* government.....He is a *surdar* of five hundred horse in the *Mahratta service*, and was at this time absent, in command of an expedition against the districts of Adilabad and Neermul, belonging to the Nizam: these are separated from *Chanda* only by a range of hills; the passes of which had been already secured, to prevent supplies of grain being carried into the enemy's country."[4] At the time of Captain Blunt's journey the Nizam was at war with the Maratha Empire, and it appears from his account that the Gonds of the frontier districts were drawn into the struggle. This tallies with the local tradition among the Gonds of Utnur Taluq, who tell of a war in which they fought on the side of the Subedar of Nirmal against the Maratha Kings of Nagpur. Another remark of Captain Blunt tends also to show that these frontier tracts, then only lightly held by the Nizam's forces were often the scene of fighting and unrest. Thus, referring to the present taluq of Chinnur, he writes as follows: "The Purgunnah I should first enter upon, subject to the *Nizam*, was Chinnoor; the capital town of which, bearing the same name, is situated on the north bank of the river Godavari. I was informed that this was the only inhabited place in the whole district, for the Zameendar who rented the country, having rebelled about seven

1. Reproduced in C. U. Wills, *British Relations with the Nagpur State in the 18th Century*, Nagpur 1926.

2. As late as 1859 it was stated before the Royal Asiatic Society that "at present the Gondwana highlands and jungle comprise such a large tract of unexplored country that they form quite an oasis on our maps." Quoted in *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Central Provinces*, Calcutta, 1908.

3. "Narrative of a Route from Chunarpur to Yettapuddum in the Ellore Circar," reprinted in *Early European Travellers in the Nagpur Territories*, Nagpur 1924.

4. *Op. cit.*, pp. 143, 144.

4: Fürer-Haimendorf E-5 (1942-1945) 1948
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years before, the *Nizam* had sent a large body of troops to subdue him; but not being able to get possession of his person, had laid waste the country, and had encouraged his vassal to pillage it likewise. This warfare had continued about four years, when the refractory Zameendar was at last betrayed by his own adherents, and murdered; after which all his strongholds were reduced. But the calamity occasioned by this scene of rapine, and murder, fell heaviest upon the peasantry, who had fled and sought refuge in the neighbouring districts and, for the last three years, there had not been an inhabitant in the whole district, excepting a few matchlockmen in the fort of Chinnoor."[1] We do not know whether the Zamindar of Chinnoor was a Gond chief, but there can be no doubt that the turbulent conditions in this and other frontier areas had very serious repercussions on the local Gond population, which probably withdrew more and more into the hills and forests.[2]

None of the standard works on the history of Hyderabad contains any reference to the developments in the area now constituting the Adilabad District subsequent to the treaty of Deogaon in 1803, when the important taluq of Rajura was added to the Nizam's Dominions, and all my attempts to obtain relevant information from unpublished records or historical treatises in Urdu, have remained unsuccessful. Such records may exist in collections of old Persian documents, but to unearth them and reconstruct with their help the history of the district in the early 19th century would be a lengthy task.[3] It is safe to assume, however, that Hyderabad rule did not bring about any immediate change in the existing order. Until 1866 the present district of Adilabad was a sub-district consisting of two divisions: the taluq of Adilabad, then called Edlabad, and a division comprising the taluqs of Sirpur and Rajura; the revenues of Edlabad and Sirpur were farmed out and Rajura was a jagir taluq granted for the payment of troops. Thus Government control was comparatively light and interfered little with the customary mode of life of the population. The officer at the head of the district was called *Amaldar* and very old men still talk of the days of the *Amaldari* when the Gonds enjoyed the use of the land untrammelled by forest-laws, and the revenue was, at least in the hill-tracts, no more than a nominal cess.

But gradually the administration was tightened, communications were improved and Government encouraged the influx of new settlers into tracts hitherto the undisputed domain of the aboriginals. The effects

1. Op. cit., p. 142.

2. Cf. R. V. Russel's remark on the fate of the Gonds under Maratha rule: "..... the Gonds were driven to take refuge in the inaccessible highlands, where the Marathas continued to pillage and harass them, until they obtained an acknowledgement of their supremacy and the promise of an annual tribute. Under such treatment the hill Gonds soon lost every vestige of civilization, and became the most treacherous savages depicted by travellers of this period....." (*Imperial Gazetteer of India, Central Provinces*, Calcutta 1908, p. 139.)

3. Mr. W. V. Colgan, I.C.S., tells me that he failed to find in the old records of the Hyderabad Residency any reference to conditions in the country which is now the Adilabad District.

4: Fürer-Haimendorf E-5 (1942-1945) 1948
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175 on the economic and social position of the Gonds were far reaching, and the repercussions attendant on the opening up of the District will be discussed in Book II, while reference to the newly established culture-contacts with non-aboriginal immigrants from both Telingana and Marathwara are contained in Chapter III.

162 In 1941 the Gonds of Hyderabad numbered 141,335, which is only a fraction of India's entire Gond population of more than 3,000,000. If we remember that this is about ten times the strength of the aboriginal population of the Australian continent at the time of discovery, and far exceeds in numbers the Red Indians in North America, it is indeed surprising to find only a slender volume of literature on this remarkable group of peoples.

114 The first reference to the Gonds in scientific literature is perhaps the small list of Gondi words communicated in 1844 by Dr. Voysey to the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.[2] A somewhat larger one, together with a few grammatical notes was given in 1847 by Dr. O. Manager,[3] and the following year B. H. Hodgson published in the same journal a comparative vocabulary of Dravidian dialects containing among others Gondi and Oraon words.[4] Fuller, though by no means complete, are the grammar and vocabulary of the Gondi spoken in the Chindwara District, compiled by the Rev. James Dawson in 1872.[5]

But the earliest ethnological account of the Gonds is contained in the Rev. Stephen Hislop's remarkable *Papers on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces*, edited by Sir R. Temple in 1866.[6] This book, though somewhat confusing in the presentation of material, is a mine of information for the initiated, and will be of permanent value for its very full version of a cycle of Gond myths both in Gondi and English. Fairly lengthy notes on various sections of Gonds are found in the administrative reports and papers of several of Hislop's contemporaries, notably Captain C. I. R. Glassford,[7] Major C. B. Lucie-Smith,[8] Sir R. Temple,[9] Sir C. Grant,[10] and Col. Ward,[11] but the information contained in these is of very uneven character. The next impor-

1. Vol. XIII. p. 19.
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. XVI. p. 286.
3. "The Aborigines of Central India," *Ibid.*, Vol. XVII, Part I, pp. 330—338.
4. *Ibid.* Vol. XXXIX, pp. 108—117, 173—198.
5. Nagpur 1866.
6. *Report on the Dependency of Berar*. 1862, Selection from Records of the Government of India, Foreign Department No. XXXIX, Calcutta 1863.—*Report on Land Revenue Settlement of Upper Godavari District*, Nagpur 1868.
7. *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of Chanda District*, Nagpur 1870.
8. *Report on the Administration of the Central Provinces up to August 1862*, (Reprint) Nagpur 1923.—*Report on the Zamindaris and other Petty Chieftainships in the Central Provinces in 1863* (Reprint) Nagpur 1923.
9. *Gazetteer of the Central Provinces*, Nagpur 1870.
10. *Mandla Settlement Report 1868*.

4: Fürer-Haimendorf E-5 (1942-1945) 1948
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tant contribution to the ethnology of the Gonds were the articles by the Rev. J. Cain, who spent a lifetime among the Koyas of the Godavari valley and published reliable, though limited information on their culture and their peculiar dialect, which is strongly influenced by Telugu.[1]

After the publication of these pioneer works interest in the Gonds waned and except for some useful notes in Captain J. Forsyth's *The Highlands of Central India*,[2] the usual paragraphs on population in various District Gazetteers published in the early years of the 20th century, and in the Census of India, 1901, little of any relevance was written on the tribe during the next fifty years. Then followed the publication of Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*, which contains in Volume IV,[3] a discussion of the position of Gondi among the Dravidian languages, and of E. Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*[4] with a useful article on the Koyas. More complete than any previous account of Gonds is R. V. Russell's article 'Gond' in *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*[5] but even this suffers to some extent from the faults of all such compilations, and, though full of interesting details, fails to draw a clear distinction between the individual Gond tribes.

C. G. Chevenix Trench's *Grammar of Gondi*,[6] on the other hand, is a work of great thoroughness and is as yet the most systematic description of a Gondi dialect. While confined to the language of Betul and the surrounding area, it is also a useful guide to the study of other Gondi dialects, and its collection of legends, stories and songs lends it considerable ethnological value.

Another approach to the Gond problem was made by C. U. Wills, the author of *The Raj-Gond Maharajas of the Satpura Hills*[7] and the *Territorial System of the Rajput Kingdoms of Mediaeval Chattisgarh*.[8] Wills' writings are mainly based on early Mohammedan sources, and throughout his history of the Gond states of the Central Provinces, he relies only on the authority of written documents, excluding, as it would seem consciously, all ethnological material. His book on the Raj-Gond Maharajas, while an excellent compilation of old records, suffers there-

1. "The Bhadrachalam Taluka, Godavari District, S. India" *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. V. 1876.—"The Bhadrachalam and Rekapalli Taluks" *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. VIII, 1879, and Vol. X. 1881.—"The Koi a Southern Tribe of the Gonds." *Journal Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XIII, 1881.

2. New edition, London 1889.—Forsyth gives in this book a poetical version of the Linga myth which is based on Hislop's text.

3. *Munda and Dravidian Languages*. Calcutta 1906.

4. Madras 1909.

5. London 1916. Vol. III, pp. 39-143.

6. Madras 1919.

7. Nagpur 1913.

8. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XV. 1919, pp. 197-262.

4: Fürer-Haimendorf E-5 (1942-1945) 1948
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fore from a certain one-sidedness; it does not, for instance, give even the clan-names of the Gond rajas of Garha-Mandla, Deogarh and Chanda.

The Census reports of 1931 contain various useful notes on the Gonds,[1] and among them a detailed description of the Muria's dormitory-system by W. V. Grigson. But it was not until 1938 that the same author gave us with his book *The Maria Gonds of Bastar*[2] the first full-scale monograph on any section of the Gond race. In the Introduction to this important volume, which puts the Bastar Gonds at last on the ethnographic map, J. H. Hutton expresses astonishment "that Indian administrators and British anthropologists should have had to wait a century for any detailed authoritative account of the Gonds of Central India." This sentiment must be shared by all who consider that during that same century numerous ethnological and anthropological expeditions passed the shores of India on their way to the Malayan Archipelago, the South Sea Islands and Australia, all of which are to-day ethnologically far better known than the mainland of India. "What one regrets most," continues Professor Hutton, "is that an early study of the Gonds might have prevented much suffering and many misfortunes, at least, that is, if it had led to the taking of measures in their interests such as Mr. Grigson was able to initiate in Bastar State during the term of his office there as Administrator and Diwan."

Grigson's book stimulated further research among Gonds both inside and outside Bastar, and recent years have seen the publication of various articles and papers by D. N. Majumdar[3] and M. P. Buradkar[4] and of an excellent grammar of the Maria language by A. N. Mitchell.[5] But by far the most important contribution to Gond studies since the publication of Grigson's monograph has come from Verrier Elwin. Already his earlier popular books[6] have given us a vivid picture of the Gonds of the Central Provinces, while his monographs *The Baiga* and *The Agaria*[7] contain many references to Gond custom. *Maria Murder and Suicide*[8] is a fascinating account of Gond life and death in Bastar,

1. 'Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces,' *Census of India* 1931, Vol. I, Part III, Section B.—W. H. Shoobert, *ibidem*, Vol. XII, Central Provinces and Berar, Part I, Report.

2. London, 1938.

3. *Tribal Cultures and Acculturation*, Presidential Address, Anthropology Section of the Indian Science Congress, 1939.—'Racial Affiliations of the Gonds of the Central Provinces,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bengal*, Vol. VII, 1941, pp. 35-56.

4. 'Totemism among the Gonds,' *Man in India*, Vol. XX, 1940, pp. 114-143, 268-289.—Kinship among the Gonds,' *Nagpur University Journal*, 1940, No. 6, pp. 147-180.

5. *A Grammar of Maria Gondi*, Jagdalpur 1942.

6. *Leaves from the Jungle*, London 1936;—*Phulmat of the Hills, a tale of the Gonds*, London 1937;—*A Cloud that's Dragonish*, London 1938.

7. Bombay 1942.

8. Bombay 1943.

4: Fürer-Haimendorf E-5 (1942-1945) 1948
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and many of Elwin's recent articles deal partly or entirely with Gonds.[1] Numerous specimens of the oral literature of Gondwana are recorded in Elwin's excellent collections *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal* and *Folk-Songs of the Maikal Hills*[2] and Shamrao Hivale, the co-author of the latter book, has made a valuable contribution to our knowledge of Gond culture by his monograph *The Pardhans of the Upper Narbhada Valley*.[3] But the most important work so far written on any Gond tribe is Verrier Elwin's monumental volume, *The Muria and their Gotul*.[4]

Grigson's and Elwin's great monographs both deal with the Gonds of Bastar, and no comparable account exists of the Raj Gonds of the Central Provinces and Hyderabad.[5] While perhaps less colourful than the hill-folks of Bastar, they occupy so important and central a position among the Gondi speaking tribes that lacking a detailed knowledge of Raj Gond culture and tradition we seem far from a solution of the Gond problem.

It was this idea which first led me to the study of the Raj Gonds in the country between the Godavari and the Penganga. When I had completed my work among the Hill Reddis of the Eastern Ghats it might have seemed logical to embark on a study of the Koyas, who are the immediate neighbours of the Reddis both on the Hyderabad and on the British side of the Godavari. For this would have rounded off the work among those aboriginal tribes of the Nizam's Dominions which lie entirely within the Telugu sphere. But judging from my limited experience of Koyas, both Gondi and Telugu speaking, I felt that it would be difficult to understand their cultural life without some knowledge of Gond culture in an area less exposed to the influence of a dominant alien civilization. So I turned northwards to where the Adilabad District, with its more than 70,000 Gonds, promised a rich field for ethnological research. I hoped that a study of these Gonds would lead more directly to the heart of the Gond problem than work among the Koyas on the periphery of the Gondi speaking area.

In December 1941 my wife and I arrived in Asifabad and undertook an informative tour through the three taluqs Asifabad, Utnur and Rajura. Travelling on foot westwards through the Pedda Vagu valley as far as Kerimeri we gained a first impression of villages where Gonds

1. 'I married a Gond,' *Man in India*, Vol. XX, 1940, pp. 228-235;—'Primitive Ideas on Menstruation and the Climacteric in Central India,' in *Essays in Anthropology presented to R. B. Sarat Chandra Roy*, Lucknow 1942, pp. 141—157.—'Conception, Pregnancy and Birth among the Tribesmen of the Maikal Hills,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Bengal*, Vol. IX., 1943, pp. 99-148.—'The Attitude of Indian Aboriginals to Sexual Impotence,' *Man in India*, Vol. XXIII, 1943, pp. 127-146.—'Folklore of the Bastar Clan-Gods,' *Man*, Vol. XLIII, 1943, pp. 97-104.—'Salt-Working among the Muria of Bastar State,' *Man* Vol. XLIV, 1944, pp. 38-41.

2. Bombay 1944.

3. Bombay 1945.

4. Bombay 1947.

5. Syed Siraj-ul-Hassan's *The Castes and Tribes of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions* (Bombay 1920) contains only a brief article on the Raj Gonds of Adilabad District, pp. 216-232.

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114 live side by side with Kolams as well as with non-aboriginal settlers, then climbed to the higher plateau and were fortunate enough to watch a clan-god feast at Pangri. On our way from Pangri to Utnur we passed Marlavai and decided on this village as our future base-camp. Early
[54] in February we went to the Keslapur Jatra, a great Gond feast and fair, held annually fifteen miles north-west of Utnur. From there we turned north and then east into Rajura Taluq, where we visited tht famous fort of Manikgarh, now deserted and overgrown by jungle. Camping in
[54] various villages of the higher plateau we gathered piecemeal information from both Gonds and Kolams, and by the end of our tour realized that a study of the aboriginals of Adilabad might lead to the very heart of the Gond problem.

123 A sligltly embarrassing circumstance during our first tour was the rapidly spreading rumour that I was a recruiting officer and had come to take young Gonds to the war. The general excitement following the Japanese invasion of Malaya, had reached even the Gonds and they interpreted my taking of notes and photographs as a preliminary selection of all the fittest men. And when at the same time the Director-General of Revenue visited Adilabad and Utnur, they took our tours for a concerted movement and thought the lorries with his camp-kit were meant to carry off the recruits. Many hid in the forest and the fields when we passed by and in the villages it was difficult to establish confidence.

But once settled in Marlavai in a house built in Gond style just outside the village, we were soon faced by a difficulty of exactly the opposite nature. For now rumour ran that I was a revenue officer, specially sent to the District to investigate the grievances of Gonds, Kolams and Naikpods, and to give land to all those whom the influx of new settlers had rendered landless. All through the hot weather and the greater part of the rains aboriginals from all parts of the district, some in delegations of thirty and forty, flocked to Marlavai, all wanting their difficulties heard and remedied. Unable to give them any concrete assistance, I had at least to listen to their tales of woe, and many a day passed when the only anthropological information swelling my note-books was the distressingly monotonous account of a culture-contact resulting invariably in the expropriation and economic enslavement of the aboriginal.[1]

114 From March to the middle of December Marlavai was our headquarters, but several tours led us to the surrounding villages and ultimately to the Tilani area as far as Rompalli and Mangi. We left the district at Christmas and returned again early in March 1943, when we toured the taluqs of Both, Kinwat and Adilabad, reaching Marlavai in the middle of April. While in Hyderabad I had succeeded in obtaining the sanction of H.E.H. the Nizam's Government for a Gond Education

1. A full account of the conditions then prevailing in the Adilabad District is contained in my reports and diaries published under the title *Tribal Hyderabad* by the Revenue Department, Government of H.E.H. the Nizam, Hyderabad 1945.

4: Fürer-Haimendorf E-5 (1942-1945) 1948
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Scheme under which instruction in reading and writing Gondi and later Marathi and Urdu was to be provided for both children and adults. On my return to Marlavai we started work on a small scale with a school where adult Gonds were to be trained as teachers and village-officers. The work on this Scheme kept us in Marlavai until the end of January 1944, and it was there that most of the chapters contained in Book I were written. After an absence of five months in Assam, we returned in the rains for a short period and this gave me the opportunity of checking my Gondi texts with the help of the Headmaster of the Marlavai Training Centre Mr. S. B. Jogalkar and the Gond teachers, some of whom had meanwhile opened schools in their own villages.[1]

The division of the present work into two books was necessitated by its bulk and by the fact that a sudden opportunity for two expeditions into one of the least known tribal areas of the North-East Frontier prevented us from concentrating on the completion of the second part.

In the presentation of facts we have departed from the usual order of a straight monograph; instead of grouping them under such headings as material culture, agriculture, or religion, we have attempted an arrangement which, we hope, will give a better idea of Gond life as an organic entity. After the introductory chapters, which describe the physical and cultural environment, we have set a section outlining the mythical background of Gond culture and the cult of the clan-deities; for in this cult and the sacred myths lies the mainspring of the social order. Then follows a section describing the economic and ritual activities of a village community throughout the cycle of the year, and the three chapters of this section contain also most of the information on agriculture, the basis of Gond economics. Book II will open with an account of the phases of life, from childhood to death, and this will set the stage for a general discussion of the social organization and the principles of Gond religion, all details of ritual having been described already in their proper setting. The old feudal system looms still in the background of the social order, and I am attempting a reconstruction based on the existing remnants and local traditions contained mainly in the stories and songs of Pardhans. Read together with Wills' history of the Gond States of the Central Provinces this will perhaps give a certain idea of political and social life prevailing in Gondwana throughout the greater part of mediæval times.

The final chapters of the book will be concerned with the developments of the last fifty years, when increased contact with other populations broke up the Gonds' feudal organization and land-hungry immigrants drove many families from the lands where they had lived since the times of their ancestors. It is a dismal tale of the decline of a once proud and happy people, the loss of economic freedom, and the birth

[1] Cf. my article 'Aboriginal Education in Hyderabad.' *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, Vol. V., 1944.

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of a timid and resigned outlook in place of the manly spirit of old. Finally I propose to discuss the results of the more liberal policy towards the aboriginals which H.E.H. the Nizam's Government has pursued since 1944, and to outline the principles and the first stages of the Gond Education Scheme, which is designed to help the Gonds in the struggle for existence and to restore to them self-respect and pride in their own ancient culture.

In an account of a culture as rich and complex as that of the Raj Gonds the anthropologist must needs concentrate on certain aspects, and in this book I have given first place to the Gonds' mythology and their complex ritual, sanctioned and sustained in almost every phase by mythical precedents. This part of Gond culture is rapidly disintegrating and its study, still possible in the hills of Utnur and Asifabad Taluqs, would come too late in the more open parts of the District. Problems of psychology and the more intimate matters of the individual's life, on the other hand, are only fleetingly touched upon, but I believe that changes in this sphere are not as rapid and the time left for their study is consequently far less limited.

Although this book is not a treatise on linguistics, Gondi texts of some length have found a place in many chapters. I noted them when collecting my material and as they are the first recorded specimens of the pecular Gondi spoken in Adilabad, I do not feel justified in withholding them from the student of Indian languages. All have been checked and rechecked with several informants, but this is no guarantee of absolute accuracy, for Gonds, like the speakers of most unwritten languages, are often careless about rules of grammar and not very sensitive to slight slips in a text read out to them. The recording, moreover, is not in accordance with the exigent demands of modern phonetics, which only the trained linguist can fulfil. Consonants are used with their values in English, and vowels with their values in Italian, long and short signs being added only where confusion might otherwise arise between two words of similar sound. Diacritical signs have been used only in the consonants ṭ, ṛ and ḥ. While the dental t, rendered by the Nagri character त , is transcribed by simple t, the cerebral t rendered in Nagri by ट, is transcribed by ṭ. Similarly the soft r, र in Nagri, is transcribed r, and the hard r, ड़ in Nagri, as ṛ. The letter ḥ stands for a sound closely resembling the German ch in Bach (pronounced like the composer). This sound occurs mainly in words of Marathi origin, and in such words most Gonds not familiar with Marathi pronounce it not as sh, but h; examples are *goḥti* (word, speech) and *paḥti* (favour) pronounced in pure Marathi as *goshti* and *pashti*; but I have transcribed these and similar words as pronounced by the Gonds in the hills.

Following the spelling of the Linguistic Survey and Trench's Grammar, I have used *iv* for all *v*-sounds, except in proper names occurring in the English text, and in words borrowed from Hindi in which *v* is